



Fifth Disease

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a mild rash illness that occurs most often in children. It is caused by the human parvovirus B19, and infects only humans. Fifth disease is also known as *erythema infectiosum* or “slapped cheek disease”.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

One to two weeks after being exposed to someone with the disease, people may have low-grade fever, tiredness, or “cold” like symptoms. A unique red facial rash, often called “slapped cheeks” follows. The rash may then spread to the body, it may fade and return and it can last up to two weeks. This rash may look lacy, and it can be itchy. About 20% of people with fifth disease do not have any symptoms. Teenagers and adults may only have short-lasting joint pain similar to arthritis.

How is fifth disease spread?

Fifth disease is spread from person to person through body fluids such as saliva or sputum. People with fifth disease can spread the virus during the week before the rash appears. By the time someone develops the rash, they are no longer spreading the virus. It usually takes between 4 – 14 days for an exposed person to become ill after being infected with the virus.

What are the complications associated with fifth disease?

While most people who have fifth disease have a mild infection, some people may have more serious illness. When pregnant women are infected in their first trimester, there is a higher risk of miscarriage. People with sickle cell disease or weakened immune systems may have severe anemia. These people should contact their health care provider if they have been exposed to fifth disease.

Who can get fifth disease?

Anyone can become infected with the virus, but it is more common in elementary school-aged children. After recovering from an infection, a person is immune, meaning he/she cannot be infected again. About 50% of adults are immune because they have already been infected with the virus.

How is fifth disease diagnosed?

Usually a healthcare provider can diagnose fifth disease based on the symptoms. If needed, a blood test can be done to confirm the diagnosis.

What is the treatment for fifth disease?

There is no specific treatment for fifth disease. Your healthcare provider will tell you how to treat the symptoms of fifth disease.

What can be done to prevent the spread of fifth disease?

- Good and frequent hand washing can prevent the spread of the virus. Since people can spread the virus before they develop the rash, good hand washing at all times is very important.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, using a tissue, immediately throw it away, then wash your hands to prevent the spread of this and other illnesses spread in the same manner.
- People with fever and a rash should stay home from school or daycare until the symptoms are gone for 24 hours, without the use of medicine.
- There is no vaccine to protect against fifth disease.